

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4756

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 ABU DHABI 2135

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MASS, TC, US

SUBJECT : UAE REQUEST FOR TOW'S

REF: STATE 178831; ABU DHABI 2102.

1. DEPARTMENT HAS BOTH IN THIS MESSAGE AND ITS PREVIOUS EXCHANGES ON SUBJECT, RAISED LEGITIMATE QUESTIONS ABOUT DESIRABILITY FROM STANDPOINT OF US INTERESTS OF SELLING TOWS TO UAE. LET US LOOK AT THESE POINTS ONE BY ONE.
2. QUESTION OF NEED. DEPARTMENT CITES AS "BASIC REASON" FOR EARLIER NEGATIVE DECISION ON TOW "ABSENCE OF ANY ARMOR THREAT TO UAE." IT SEEMS TO US GENERAL KHALDI ADDRESSED HIMSELF EFFECTIVELY TO THIS POINT. UAE'S NEIGHBORS -- SAUDI

ARABIA, IRAN, OMAN -- HAVE TANKS. FURTHER AFIELD, IRAQ HAS THEM. AS LONG AS THERE WERE NO ROADS IN THIS AREA, SAND COULD BE CONSIDERED EFFECTIVE BARRIER TO ATTACK BY ARMOR. BUT THERE ARE NOW, BY OUR COUNT, FIVE HARD SURFACE ROADS INTO UAE FROM OMAN, WITH COUPLE MORE HARD TRACKS THAT WOULD BE PASSABLE TO TANKS. COASTAL ROAD FROM WEST INTO UAE WILL SOON BE METALLED ITS ENTIRE LENGTH. AT PRESENT, IT IS TRUE, UAE FACES NO "THREAT" FROM ANY OF ITS NEIGHBORS.

BUT NEITHER DID THE EMIRATE OF KUWAIT IN 1950. NOW WE ARE PREPARED TO PROVIDE NEARLY A BILLION DOLLARS OF ADVANCED WEAPONRY TO KUWAIT BECAUSE ITS PREVIOUSLY

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PEACEABLE NEIBHBOR TO NORTH UNDERWENT CHANGE OF REGIME AND

TURNED AGGRESSIVE. IT DOESN'T STRAIN THE BOUNDS OF PROBABILITY TO SUGGEST THAT SAME KIND OF THING COULD HAPPEN AT THIS END OF GULF. AS CHIEF MILITARY PLANNER FOR UAE, KHALDI WOULD BE DERELICT IF HE SOLD UAE'S RULERS ON PROPOSITION THAT COUNTRY'S DEFENSE POSTURE OUGHT TO REST ON ASSUMPTION THAT COUP D'ETAT WAS INCONCEIVABLE IN EITHER OMAN, QATAR OR SAUDI ARABIA, OR THAT TANKS IN HOSTILE LANDS COULD NEVER APPEAR ON ROADS LEADING FROM THESE DIRECTIONS. OBVIOUSLY NEITHER TOWNS NOR ANY WEAPON SYSTEM PER SE IN HANDS OF UAEDF WOULD BE DECISIVE DETERRENT TO DETERMINED ATTACK FROM ONE OF UAE'S LARGER NEIGHBORS, BUT AN EFFECTIVE ANTI-ARMOR CAPABILITY COULD GIVE A HOSTILE NEIGHBOR ADDITIONAL PAUSE, COULD GIVE A THREATENED UAE THE TIME IT NEEDED TO GET MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM ONE OF ITS POWERFUL NEIGHBORS. OUR READINESS TO SELL KUWAIT ARMS AS DETERRENT TO ATTACK FROM IRAQ BASED ON SAME RATIONALE.

3. DO WE WANT A UAE THAT CAN PROTECT ITSELF? QUESTION WAS NOT RAISED BY DEPARTMENT BUT IT IS VALID ONE TO ASK. AFTER ALL, WITH ALL THOSE PALESTINIANS MILLING AROUND IN ABU DHABI ISN'T THAT THE MOST LIKELY PLACE FOR COUP BY RADICAL FORCES, AND IF IT OCCURRED, WOULDN'T WE WANT SAUDI ARABIA OR IRAN TO BE ABLE TO MOVE IN TO SUPPRESS IT WITH MINIMUM OF DIFFICULTY? WHY THEN SHOULD WE PROVIDE UAEDF WITH INCREASED DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY? LOGIC HERE IS FINE IF ONE ACCEPTS THE ASSUMPTION THAT UAE IS, COMPARED TO OTHER STATES IN AREA, A BETTER CANDIDATE FOR COUP BY RADICAL FORCES. WE DO NOT THINK SUCH ASSESSMENT CAN BE MADE WITH CONFIDENCE. FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, IF WE HAD TO MAKE RANK ORDER OF STATES IN THIS AREA FOR THEIR STRENGTH IN TERMS OF LONG-TERM STABILITY, WE WOULD PLACE OMAN SOMEWHAT LOWER THAN UAE ON SCALE, SAUDI ARABIA HIGHER, BUT WOULD HAVE LITTLE CONFIDENCE THAT THIS LISTING WOULD NECESSARILY HOLD UP FOR LONG. IN OTHER WORDS, POSITING FOR SAKE OF THIS DISCUSSION SOME KIND OF POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN THIS AREA, WE BELIEVE

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THERE IS AT LEAST EQUAL CHANCE AND PROBABLY BETTER THAN EQUAL CHANCE OF CONDITIONS EMERGING THAT WOULD MAKE USG HAPPY TO SEE UAE ABLE TO MUSTER SOME DETERRENT TO EXTERNAL ATTACK.

4. US ARMS POLICY FOR LOWER GULF. WE SUBSCRIBE TO BASIC TENETS OF THIS POLICY: VIZ. THAT SECURITY OF REGION AS WHOLE RESTS WITH IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA AS

REGION'S LARGEST STATES, AND THAT WE DO NOT WANT TO SEE AN ARMS RACE SET IN MOTION AMONG SMALLER STATES OF GULF. BUT THERE MUST BE SOME FLEXIBILITY IN APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY AS IT AFFECTS SMALL STATES OF AREA. WE INDEED DO NOT WANT TO SEE ARMS RACE, BUT WE MUST ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE LEGITIMACY OF THESE STATES' CONVICTION THAT THEY ARE ENTITLED TO MAINTAIN SOMETHING MORE IN WAY OF DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY THAN WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR INTERNAL SECURITY. MOREOVER, IT STRIKES US AS UNREALISTIC TO LUMP ALL OF "LOWER GULF STATES" INTO ONE CATEGORY FOR PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY. COMPARED WITH IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA THEY ARE SMALL, BUT AMONG THEMSELVES THEY DIFFER GREATLY. UAE HAS GREATER LAND AREA, POPULATION, OIL PRODUCTION AND POTENTIAL THAN QATAR OR BAHRAIN. WHY THEN SADDLE OUR RELATIONS WITH UAE WITH POLICY THAT WITHOUT MUCH LOGIC SAYS ANYTHING WE DO FOR UAE HAS TO BE DONE EQUALLY FOR QATAR OR BAHRAIN?

5. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT - A SENSE OF PROPORTION. THREE DAYS AGO THE HERALD TRIBUNE CARRIED NEWS ITEM THAT SAID WE WERE PREPARING TO SELL SAUDIS SIDEWINDER MISSILES, HAD AGREED TO ONE BILLION PLUS SALE OF IMPROVED HAWKS, WERE TRYING TO TALK THEM OUT F-15'S BUT WOULD CERTAINLY PROVIDE MORE F-5'S, ETC. AND EVERY DAY THERE ARE STORIES OF US ARMS GOING INTO IRAN THAT FOR SHEER VARIETY AND QUANTITY BOGGLE THE MIND. UAE OFFICIALS READ THESE STORIES AS WELL AS OURSELVES. THEY ARE THEN TOLD THAT WHILE WE ARE PREPARED TO PROVIDE RIFLES AND BAYONETS, UAE CANNOT HAVE A MODERN ANTI-TANK WEAPON. IS THE SAME BEADY EYE ABOUT JUSTIFICATION OF NEED THAT PARA 5 OF STATE 178831 BRINGS TO BEAR ON UAE REQUEST FOR SMALL QUANTITY OF TOWS APPLIED TO
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SAUDI ARMS REQUESTS? THAT THE ANSWER IS NEGATIVE IS AS APPARENT TO UAE OFFICIALS AS IT IS TO US. NO UAE OFFICIAL IS SO NAIVE AS TO EXPECT THE US TO BE GIVING UAE SAME ATTENTION AS SAUDI ARABIA, BUT WHEN DOUBLE STANDARD IN THIS SENSE--A WHOLE LOT OF FLEXIBILITY IN APPLICATION OF OUR PRINCIPLES IN ONE SPOT AND NONE NEXT DOOR--PRODUCES SUCH STARK CONTRAST IN TERMS OF FORTHCOMINGNESS, IT WILL INEVITABLY AFFECT OUR OVERALL BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THIS COUNTRY TO OUR DETRIMENT. YET WE ARE TALKING OF STATE WHOSE OIL PRODUCTION WILL RISE TO 2.5 MBD BY 1978 AND POSSIBLY CLOSER TO 3 MBD IF OIL IS FOUND IN QUANTITY IN RAS AL-KHAIMAH, WITH ALL IMPLICATIONS THIS HAS FOR US COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, AS WELL AS GROWING UAE STRENGTH WITHIN OPEC AND INTERNATIONAL

FINANCE. IT DOES NOT SEEM SENSIBLE TO BURDEN OUR RELATIONS WITH STATE HAVING THIS KIND OF FUTURE WITH HIGHLY RESTRICTIVE ARMS POLICY WHICH WE APPLY TO THE LETTER HERE BUT ARE WILLING TO MAKE ALL KINDS OF EXCEPTIONS TO PRACTICALLY EVERYWHERE ELSE IN REGION.

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6. CONGRESSIONAL SENSITIVITIES. WE RECOGNIZE STRENGTH OF OPINION THAT HAS BUILT UP IN RECENT YEARS IN CONGRESS ON SUBJECT OF ARMS SALES TO THIS AREA, BUT IT ALSO SEEMS TO US THAT CONGRESS HAS GIVEN ITS APPROVAL TO MOST SALES WHEN CASE CAN BE MADE THAT REQUEST IS LEGITIMATE ITEM OF DEFENSE FOR STATE WITH WHICH WE HAVE FRIENDLY RELATIONS. WE BELIEVE TOWS FOR UAE WOULD STAND UP TO ANALYSIS IN THIS SENSE WERE KEY PEOPLE IN CONGRESS TO BE SOUNDED OUT ABOUT IT. ALTHOUGH CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES HAVE BEEN CITED BOTH IN STATE REFTEL AND IN PREVIOUS GO-AROUND ON TOWS AS FACTOR MILITATING AGAINST POSITIVE RESPONSE, WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT ANYONE IN DEPARTMENT HAS GONE DOWN TO THE HILL TO DISCOVER WHAT THOSE ATTITUDES ACTUALLY ARE ON THIS SPECIFIC CASE. I WILL SHORTLY BE BACK IN WASHINGTON AND WOULD BE HAPPY TO DEVOTE SOME OF MY TIME TO JOIN WITH NEA AND H IN SEEKING OUT APPROPRIATE CONGRESSMEN TO DISCUSS UAE REQUEST.

7. CONCLUSION: WE DO NOT MINIMIZE NEGATIVE ARGUMENTS ON THIS QUESTION AND RECOGNIZE THAT DECISION ON TOWS FOR UAE MERITS CAREFUL CONSIDERATION. NEVERTHELESS, WE GENUINELY BELIEVE WEIGHT OF ARGUMENT IS IN FAVOR

OF POSITIVE DECISION IN THIS CASE. WE PARTICULARLY
DO NOT FIND PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT THAT DEPARTMENT SAYS
IS "BASIC REASON" FOR ITS PREVIOUS NEGATIVE DECISION --
THAT UAE FACES NO PRESENT THREAT FROM ARMORED ATTACK.
TODAY'S PEACEFUL BORDER CAN OVERNIGHT BECOME THE
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DIRECTION FROM WHICH A HOSTILE ATTACK CAN BE DIGDCTED.
IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA ALONE WE HAVE SEEN THIS
HAPPEN IN THE CASE OF KUWAIT AND IRAQ, OF OMAN AND
THE PDRY. IN EACH OF THOSE CASES WE DECIDED TOW
WAS AN
APPROPRIATE WEAPON TO SUPPLY IN VIEW OF
THREAT THESE STATES FACED. IT IS CERTAINLY NOT UN-
REASONABLE FOR UAE TO BE VIEWING THIS EVIDENCE AND
DECIDING THAT IT WOULD LIKE TO BE PREPARED BEFORE
THE THREAT ACTUALLY EMERGES.
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